



View of the US Consulate in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua State, Mexico on March 2. Suspected drug cartel "hit teams" murdered an American consular employee and her husband in a Mexican border city Saturday and killed the husband of another consular official in two separate attacks, a US official said.

(AFP/File/Jesus Alcazar)

2 Americans killed in drive-by shooting in Mexico

By PHILIP ELLIOTT,
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON – Three people with ties to the American consulate in a drug-plagued Mexican city were killed in a drive-by shooting, a U.S. official said Sunday.

The department noted the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City has advised American citizens to delay unnecessary travel to parts of the Mexican states of Durango, Coahuila and Chihuahua.

Two American citizens and a spouse of a Mexican employee were killed Saturday afternoon, a U.S. official said. The official spoke only on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive information. The White House said President Barack Obama was "deeply saddened and outraged" by the killings of those linked to the U.S. mission in Ciudad Juarez.

"He extends his condolences to the families and condemns these attacks on consular and diplomatic personnel serving at our foreign missions," the White House said in a

statement. "In concert with Mexican authorities, we will work tirelessly to bring their killers to justice." The State Department authorized U.S. government employees at six U.S. consulates in northern Mexico to send their family members out of the area because of concerns about rising drug-related violence. At least 18,000 people have been killed since Mexican President Felipe Calderon launched an offensive against drug traffickers in December 2006. The State Department said it would allow family members of diplomatic staff to leave border cities of Tijuana, Nogales, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, Monterrey and

Matamoros.

State Department spokesman Fred Lash said the decision to authorize consular employees' family members to leave the area was based not only on Saturday's killings but also on a wider pattern of violence and threats in northern Mexico in recent weeks.

The bloody drug war in has plagued the 200-mile U.S.-Mexican border for years, and once-busy streets are empty after dark. More than 45,000 soldiers have been dispatched to fight cartels since Calderon took office in late 2006, but the U.S. has been critical of Mexican efforts to fight the drug trade amid complaints of human rights abuses. □



AP Exclusive: Pentagon gun was from Tenn. Police

By DEVLIN BARRETT,
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON – Two guns used in high-profile shootings this year at the Pentagon and a Las Vegas courthouse both came from the same unlikely place: the police and court system of Memphis, Tenn.

Law enforcement officials told The Associated Press that both guns were once seized in criminal cases in Memphis. The officials described how the weapons made their separate ways from an evidence vault to gun dealers and to the shooters.

The use of guns that once were in police custody and were later involved in attacks on police officers highlights a little-known divide in gun policy in the United States:

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FILE - In this Nov. 6, 2007 file photo, Miami police chief John Timoney speaks during a news conference. Law enforcement officials say two guns used in high-profile attacks, one at the Pentagon, and another from the fatal January shooting of an officer at a Las Vegas courthouse, both came from the same unlikely place: the police and court system of Memphis, Tennessee.

(AP Photo/David Adame, File)



Pope Benedict XVI greets the faithful from his studio's window at the end of the Angelus noon prayer in St. Peter's square at the Vatican, Sunday, March 14, 2010.

(AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

Vatican denies celibacy rule led to sex scandal

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Obama promise: Brighter education futures for kids

By **DORIE TURNER**,
Associated Press Writer

ATLANTA — President Barack Obama is promising parents and their kids that with his administration's help they will have better teachers in improved schools so U.S. students can make up for academic ground lost against youngsters in other countries.

A plan to overhaul the 2002 education law championed by President George W. Bush was unveiled by the Obama administration Saturday in hopes of replacing a system that in the last decade has tagged more than a third of schools as failing and created a hodgepodge of sometimes weak academic standards among states.

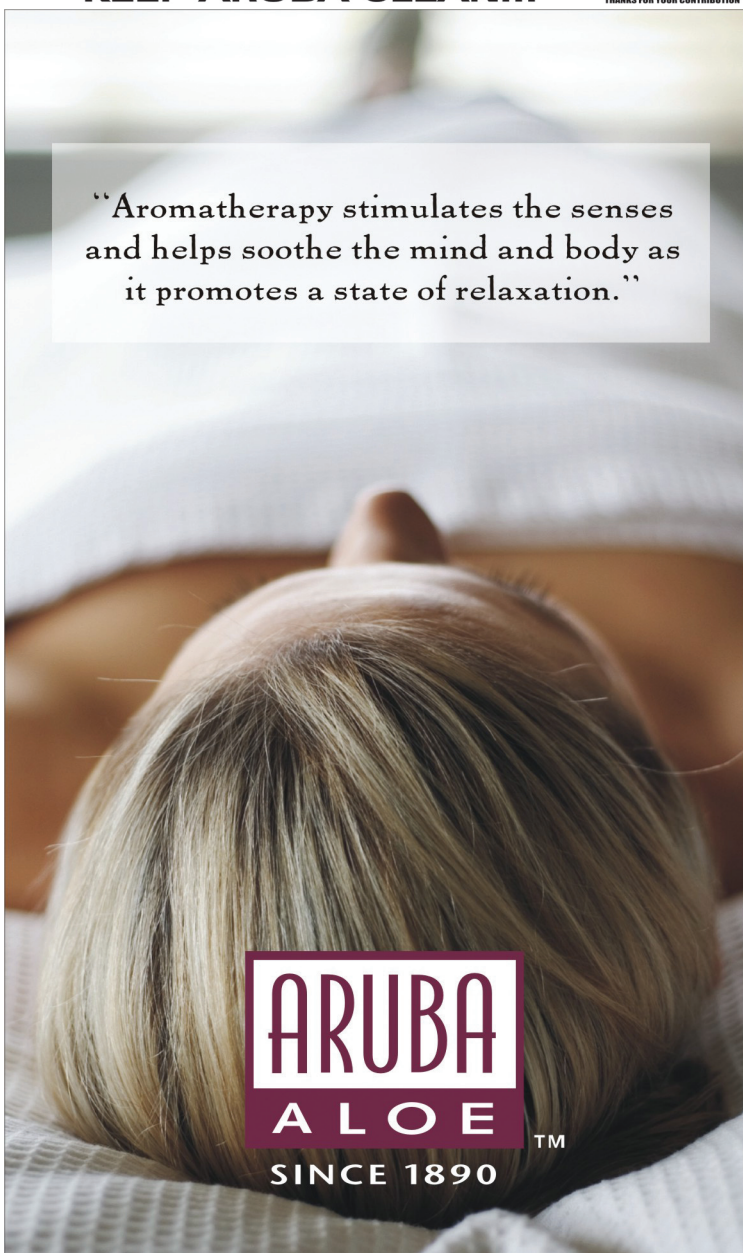
"Unless we take action — unless we step up — there are countless children who will never realize their full talent and potential," Obama said during a video address on Saturday. "I don't accept that future for them. And I don't accept that future for the United States of America."

In the proposed dismantling of the No Child Left Behind law, education officials would move away from punishing schools that don't meet benchmarks and focus on rewarding schools for progress, particularly with poor and minority students. Obama intends to send

a rewrite to Congress on Monday of the law. The proposed changes call for states to adopt standards that ensure students are ready for college or a career rather than grade-level proficiency — the focus of the current law. The blueprint also would allow states to use subjects other than reading and mathematics as part of their measurements for meeting federal goals, pleasing many education groups that have said No Child Left Behind encouraged teachers not to focus on history, art, science, social studies and other important subjects. And, for the first time in 45 years, the White House is proposing a \$4 billion increase in federal education spending, most of which would go to increase the competition among states for grant money and move away from formula-based funding. The blueprint goes before the House Education and Labor Committee on Wednesday as Obama pushes Congress to reauthorize the education law this year, a time-consuming task that some observers say will be difficult. Committee Chairman George Miller, a Democrat from California, praised Obama's plan. "This blueprint lays the right markers to help us reset the bar for our students and the nation," Miller said in a prepared statement.

Continued on Page 4

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AP EXCLUSIVE

Continued from Front Page

Many cities and states destroy guns gathered in criminal probes, but others sell or trade the weapons in order to get other guns or buy equipment such as bulletproof vests.

In fact, on the day of the Pentagon shooting, March 4, the Tennessee governor signed legislation revising state law on confiscated guns. Before, law enforcement agencies in the state had the option of destroying a gun. Under the new version, agencies can only destroy a gun if it's inoperable or unsafe.

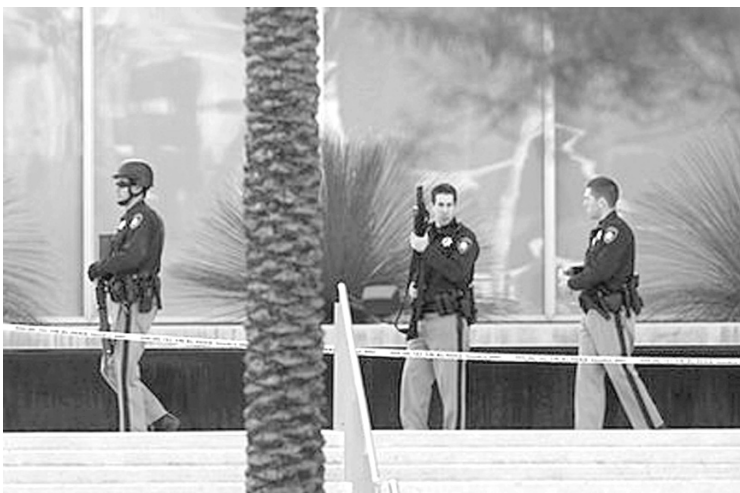
Kentucky has a similar law, but it's not clear how many other states have laws specifically designed to promote the police sale or trade of confiscated weapons.

A nationwide review by The Associated Press in December found that over the previous two years, 24 states — mostly in the South and West, where gun-rights advocates are particularly strong — have passed 47 new laws loosening gun restrictions. Gun rights groups are making a greater effort to pass favorable legislation in state capitals.

John Timoney, who led the Philadelphia and Miami police departments and served as New York's No. 2 police official, said he doesn't believe police departments should be putting more guns into the market.

"I just think it's unseemly for police departments to be selling guns that later turn up," he said, recalling that he had once been offered the chance to sell guns to raise money for the police budget.

"Obviously, we always need the money but I just said, 'No, we will take the loss and get rid



FILE - In this Jan. 4, 2010, file photo law enforcement surround the Lloyd D. George federal courthouse building in downtown Las Vegas following a shooting. Law enforcement officials say two guns used in high-profile attacks, one at the Pentagon, and another from the fatal January shooting of an officer at a Las Vegas courthouse, both came from the same unlikely place: the police and court system of Memphis, Tennessee.

(AP Photo/Isaac Brekken, File)

of the guns'," said the former police chief, who now works for Andrews International, a security consulting firm.

A spokeswoman for the Memphis police said gun swaps are a way to save taxpayer money. One of the weapons in the Pentagon attack was seized by Memphis police in 2005 and later traded to a

gun dealer; the gun used in the Jan. 4 courthouse shooting in Las Vegas as sold by a judge's order and the proceeds given to the Memphis-area sheriff's office. Neither weapon was sold by the Memphis law enforcement agencies directly to the men who later used them to shoot officers.

In both cases, the weapons

first went to licensed gun dealers, but later came into the hands of men who were legally barred from possessing them: one a convicted felon; the other mentally ill.

The history of the two guns in the recent attacks was described by officials from multiple law enforcement agencies

on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss details of the investigations. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives provided reports on the gun traces to the investigating agencies, but is barred from publicly disclosing the results.

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House Democrat says still short on health votes

By John Whitesides

WASHINGTON (Reuters) — White House officials on Sunday confidently predicted quick final passage of healthcare reform but a top Democratic vote-counter said the party still needs to line up more support in the House of Representatives. With President Barack Obama's sweeping healthcare overhaul headed for a final House vote this week, House Democratic Whip James Clyburn said Democrats were short for now of the 216 votes needed but he was confident they could find them. "We don't have them as of this morning, but we've been working this thing all weekend, we'll be working it going into the week, I'm also very confident that we'll

get this done," Clyburn, the No. 3 House Democrat who is entrusted with lining up the party's votes, said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Senior White House adviser David Axelrod and spokesman Robert Gibbs appeared on a series of Sunday morning talk shows to say the stalled overhaul, Obama's top legislative priority, was headed for approval in the House this week.

"I think we will have the votes to pass this," Axelrod said on CNN's "State of the Union." Obama delayed his first overseas trip of the year this week to help round up votes for healthcare reform, the focus of a long-running political brawl with Republican opponents that has consumed the U.S.

Congress for the last nine months.

House Democrats are scrambling to win final passage of the Senate's healthcare bill among Democrats unhappy with key provisions -- including language on the ban on federal funding for abortion -- and nervous about November's elections in which Republicans could challenge their control of Congress.

"This is the climactic week for healthcare reform," Gibbs said on CBS's "Face the Nation" program. "The House will have passed the Senate bill a week from today."

In a two-step process, House Democrats want to approve the Senate's version of the bill and make changes sought by Obama and House Democrats through a separate measure passed under budget reconciliation rules.

Those rules require only a simple majority in the 100-member Senate, bypassing the need for 60 votes to overcome Republican procedural hurdles. The House and

BRIGHTER EDUCATION Continued from Page 2

Meanwhile, the American Federation of Teachers, which represents more than 1.4 million educators nationwide, issued a statement Saturday criticizing the plan, saying "it just doesn't make sense to have teachers — and teachers alone — bear the responsibility for school and student success."



The fierce and escalating battle over health care reform has forced President Barack Obama, seen here with healthcare professionals on March 3, to delay his departure on a trip to Indonesia and Australia by three days until Sunday, March 21.

(AFP/File/Saul Loeb)

Senate hope to finish work on the second bill before starting a two-week Easter recess on March 26.

House Republican leader John Boehner agreed with Clyburn that Democrats do not have the votes yet to pass the healthcare bill and said he would try to keep it from happening.

'MAKE IT DIFFICULT'

"If they had the votes, then it would be law," Boehner said of Democrats on CNN. "We're going to do everything

we can to make it difficult for them, if not impossible to pass the bill." House Democrats have expressed concern about whether the Senate will follow up their vote and pass the reconciliation bill with the changes they are seeking.

Richard Durbin, the Senate's No. 2 Democrat, told NBC the House should have "absolute assurance that when reconciliation comes over to the Senate side, we're going to pass it." □

"It appears from our first review that despite some promising rhetoric, this blueprint places 100 percent of the responsibility on teachers and gives them zero percent authority," the statement said. Education Secretary Arne Duncan briefed a handful of governors, lawmakers and education groups on the plan Friday, including Georgia Gov.

Sonny Perdue, a Republican. "The governor is very supportive of the direction the secretary is going," said Perdue's spokesman Chris Schrimpf. A few other highlights from the blueprint:

- By 2020, all students graduating from high school would need to be ready for college or a career. That's a shift away from the current law, which calls for all students to be performing at grade level in reading and math by 2014.

- Give more rewards — money and flexibility — to high-poverty schools that are seeing big gains in student achievement and use them as a model for other schools in low-income neighborhoods that struggle with performance. □

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Post-snow, Northeast mops up from wind-driven rain

By **BRUCE SHIPKOWSKI**,
Associated Press Writer
EGG HARBOR CITY, N.J. — Last month, the Northeast was smothered by blizzards. Now, it's waterlogged by torrential rains.

The region mopped up Sunday following a bout with high wind and heavy rains that uprooted trees, downed power lines and flooded some creeks and rivers. Five people died in storm-related accidents and hundreds of thousands were without electricity.

More than a half-million customers in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut lost electricity at the peak of Saturday's storm, which carried wind gusts of up to 70 mph. It came about two weeks after heavy snow and hurricane-force winds left more than a million customers in the Northeast in the dark.

"I spent most of the past few months clearing snow and ice out my driveway, sidewalks, front walks, and now we're picking up all these branches," Jack Alexander said as he and

his family worked to clear debris from the front yard of their Egg Harbor City home. "It seems like we've had every type of weather event you could have this winter — I'm almost afraid to see what else can happen."

Farther north in Jackson Township, drivers were negotiating stretches of flooded roadways and detours caused by fallen trees and accidents.

"Fortunately it's a Sunday, so there's not as much traffic to deal with" said Vanna Hayes, a 32-year-old New York City resident who was in the area to visit relatives. "We wanted to go to Atlantic City last night, but we put it off because it looked like a monsoon was happening down there."

In Manhattan, Broadway's sidewalks and trash cans were littered with hundreds of shattered umbrellas.

"Last night was wicked," said Ron Recoskie, heading out for brunch and shopping on the Upper West Side. "I've never seen so many umbrellas on the street."

At the storm's peak, more than

265,000 customers in the New York City area and 235,000 customers in New Jersey were without power. The Philadelphia area reported 70,000 customers without electricity, while more than 80,000 customers in Connecticut sat in the dark.

PECO, an electric company serving the Philadelphia area, had assistance from crews from western Pennsylvania and Michigan, but some customers may have to wait until Monday for power to be restored, spokesman Fred Maher said. Falling trees proved to be a deadly hazard.

One person was killed and three others were injured in Westport, Conn., after a tree fell on a car Saturday night during the storm, police said.

Authorities in the suburb of Teaneck, N.J., said two neighbors were killed by a falling tree as they headed home from a prayer service at a synagogue. The men — 49-year-old Ovadia Mussaffi, president of the Sephardic Congregation of Teaneck, and 54-year-old Lawrence Krause



A tree lies across a smashed car at a home in Wantagh, N.Y., Sunday, March 14, 2010. Strong winds and heavy rain downed trees and power lines throughout New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut on Saturday, leaving hundreds of thousands of people without power.

(AP Photo/Chris Corradino)

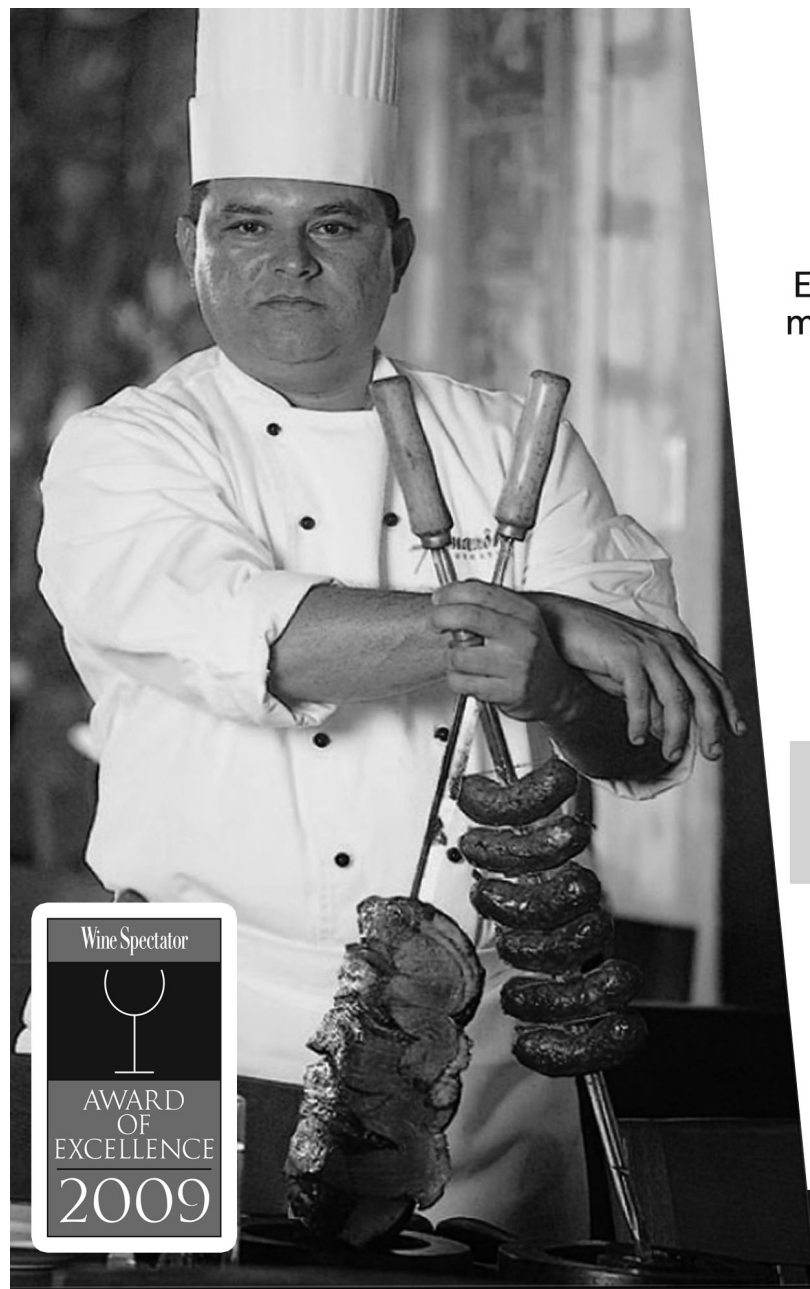
— were struck by a large oak tree around 7 p.m., Bergen County Prosecutor John L. Molinelli said Sunday.

In Hartsdale, N.Y., another suburb, a man was killed when a large tree crushed the roof of his car and entangled it in live wires. Brendan McGrath, 58, of Auburn, N.Y., was found dead in his 2009 Hyundai sedan. His wife, Mary, also 58, escaped

from the passenger side.

In Rhode Island, an off-duty state trooper died in a crash early Sunday after his car hydroplaned in a large patch of standing water left from the weekend's storms, state police said. James Dougherty Jr., a 41-year-old detective sergeant, was killed in West Greenwich.

The storm also left damaged buildings in its wake. □



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Pope Benedict XVI waves at the end of his visit at Rome's Lutheran church March 14, 2010. Pope Benedict told Rome's Lutheran congregation on Sunday that Protestants and Roman Catholics should be thankful for all the unity achieved among Christians rather than complain about the slow pace of dialogue.

REUTERS/Tony Gentile

By NICOLE WINFIELD,
Associated Press Writer

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican on Sunday denied that its celibacy requirement for priests was the root cause of the clerical sex abuse scandal convulsing the church in

Europe and again defended the pope's handling of the crisis. Suggestions that the celibacy rule was in part responsible for the "deviant behavior" of sexually abusive priests have swirled in recent days, with opinion pieces in German

Vatican denies celibacy rule led to sex scandal

newspapers blaming it for fueling abuse and even Italian commentators questioning the rule.

Much of the furor was spurred by comments from one of the pope's closest advisers, Vienna archbishop Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, who called this week for an honest examination of issues like celibacy and priestly education to root out the origins of sex abuse.

"Part of it is the question of celibacy, as well as the subject of character development. And part of it is a large portion of honesty, in the church but also in society," he wrote in the online edition of his diocesan newsletter.

His office quickly stressed that Schoenborn wasn't calling into question priestly celibacy, which Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed as recently as Friday as an "expression of the gift of oneself to God and others."

But Schoenborn has in the past shown himself receptive

to arguments that a celibate priesthood is increasingly problematic for the church, primarily because it limits the number of men who seek ordination.

Last June, Schoenborn personally presented the Vatican with a lay initiative signed by prominent Austrian Catholics calling for the celibacy rule to be abolished and for married men to be allowed to become priests.

In the days following Schoenborn's editorial this week, several prominent prelates in Germany and at the Vatican shot down any suggestion that the celibacy rule had anything to do with the scandal, a point echoed Sunday by the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano.

"It's been established that there's no link," said the article by Bishop Giuseppe Versaldi, an emeritus professor of canon law and psychology at the Pontifical Gregorian

University in Rome.

"First off, it's known that sexual abuse of minors is more widespread among lay people and those who are married than in the celibate priesthood," he wrote. "Secondly, research has shown that priests guilty of abuse had long before stopped observing celibacy." A report endorsed in 2004 by the U.S. Catholic bishops' conference, however, argued that an understanding of the problem of clerical sex abuse isn't possible without reference to both celibacy and homosexuality, since the vast majority of U.S. abuse cases were of a homosexual nature. While stressing neither celibacy nor homosexuality causes abuse, the report said "The church did an inadequate job both of screening out those individuals who were destined to fail in meeting the demands of the priesthood, and of forming others to meet those demands, including the rigors of a celibate life."

In its article on the scandal, L'Osservatore also staunchly defended Benedict's handling of the crisis.

The article — subtitled "The rigor of Benedict against the filth in the church" — called the pope a "vigilant shepherd of his flock" for having confronted the crisis decisively early on and taken charge of abuse cases himself as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Vatican has been on the defensive ever since the first of some 170 former students from Catholic schools in Benedict's native Germany came forward with claims of physical and sexual abuse, including at a boys choir once led by the pope's brother. □



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Taliban: Kandahar bombings a 'warning' to NATO

By NOOR KHAN
KAY JOHNSON,
Associated Press Writers

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — The Taliban on Sunday called their deadly bomb attacks on the southern city of Kandahar a warning to NATO's top general that the insurgents were ready for the war's next major offensive in their heartland.

The series of bombings that demolished buildings and killed dozens — including 10 people at a wedding — prompted the provincial governor to plead for more security in the area. Fearful residents said they had no confidence that either government or foreign troops can protect them.

Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi said the Saturday night attacks proved the insurgents were still able to operate despite the buildup of Afghan and international troops in preparation for a

push into Kandahar province. A Taliban-linked Web site called the attacks in the south's largest city a "warning" to NATO's Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who has said coalition forces will target Kandahar later this year after driving the insurgents from a key stronghold in neighboring Helmand province.

"Gen. McChrystal has said that soon they will start their operations, and now we have already started our operations," Ahmadi told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. "With all the preparations they have taken, still they are not able to stop us."

However, Ministry of Interior spokesman Zemer Bashary said the attacks failed to achieve their main objective, which was apparently to repeat the success of a 2008 suicide bombing at the prison gates that freed hundreds of criminals and suspected

insurgents. Canadian troops had recently reinforced the lockup with cement block, so Saturday's blast did not break through and no inmates escaped this time.

"They wanted to free the prisoners ... but they failed in their mission," Bashary said. The multiple explosions — there were at least five blasts, four of them suicide attacks — killed at least 35 people, according to the Ministry of Interior. Another 57 were wounded in the attacks, which hit the city's prison, police headquarters, a wedding hall next door and other areas on roads leading to the prison. Kandahar provincial Gov. Tooryalai Wesa told reporters that he had asked the central government in Kabul for more Afghan troops to protect the city in the run-up to the expected offensive in the province, which is the spiritual birthplace of the Taliban.

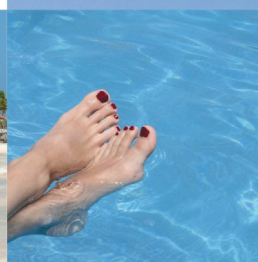


A former member of Taliban look at weapons during a ceremony to hand them over to the Afghan government in Herat, west of Kabul, Afghanistan, Sunday, March 14, 2010. Thirty Taliban militants joined the peace process Sunday and delivered their weapons and ammunition to the Regional Peace and Reconciliation Commission-Western Afghanistan in Herat province.

(AP Photo/Reza Shirmohammadi)

He also said he wants to coordinate with NATO forces to improve security. Bashary said the government was considering Wesa's request. Kandahar city, population

800,000, was the seat of government for the Taliban when it ruled Afghanistan, imposing its vision of Islamic theocracy for five years before being toppled by U.S.-backed forces in 2001. □



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UN chief sees dangers up-close in Haiti quake camp

By JONATHAN M. KATZ, Associated Press Writer
PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon came to Haiti on Sunday to offer assurances of his commitment to a post-earthquake nation that is short of shelter and suffering growing violence in teeming camps for the homeless. Security issues and the risk of flooding and disease in the squalid tarp-and-tent cities are pressing concerns for governments and international aid groups struggling to help hundreds of thousands of victims of the Jan. 12 disaster. On Sunday the South Korean native's made his second visit to Haiti since the magnitude-7 earthquake killed an estimated 230,000 people and left 1.3 million homeless. "He's made a point of going there to talk to them directly and convey his personal concern, and also to reassure them that the assistance they are expecting is still a

major priority for the U.N.," spokesman Yves Sorokobi said.

The U.N. leader is scheduled to tour a camp of more than 40,000 people and meet with President Rene Preval before returning to New York.

The camp — a tapestry of blue, orange and white tarps and tents sprawled across a valley golf course — is emblematic of the mixed results of a \$2.2 billion international aid effort so far.

Behind the tents is a country club that became the base of the U.S. Army 82nd Airborne in the days after the disaster. Thousands of families came from their broken homes in the hills above to be near food and water distributions overseen by the U.S. soldiers. Those distributions, like those run by the U.N. World Food Program and others, were largely a success — though many were marred by small-scale violence and corruption by local officials.

The camp has been a hub of NGO activity, with schools, medical clinics and social programs setting up under canvas tents. But the valley is at major risk for floods and landslides when the rainy season starts in earnest next week.

And only half of Haiti's quake homeless have received even plastic sheets to protect them from deluges.

The trouble is that they have nowhere to go: Despite two months of effort to establish government-run relocation camps on Port-au-Prince's outskirts, not one has yet opened.

Aid groups say they are ready to build but don't have the land. Government officials insist they are making progress on finding sites in closed-door negotiations with private landowners.

With no electricity or security, the camps are also dangerous at night, especially for women and girls increasingly at risk



Women carry a bag of rice on their heads at a food distribution center in Port-au-Prince, Sunday, March 14, 2010. The 7.0-magnitude earthquake that hit Haiti on Jan. 12 left more than a million people living in makeshift camps.

(AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

of sexual assault.

Ban has also become concerned by reports of increasing gang activity, his spokesman said. More than 5,000 prisoners fled jails that collapsed or were damaged in the temblor. Only about 200 have been captured. Two European women with the Doctors Without Borders

aid group were kidnapped last week and held for five days. It was not clear if a ransom was paid. U.N. humanitarian chief John Holmes said last week that the United Nations is struggling to raise the final quarter of a \$1.44 billion appeal to help earthquake victims this year.

Brazil's Lula kicks off Mideast tour

JERUSALEM — Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva arrived in the Middle East on Sunday, seeking to bring a fresh outlook to the peace process on a trip to Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan.

His official programme begins on Monday with a meeting with his Israeli counterpart Shimon Peres, followed by talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and opposition leader Tzipi Livni.

On Tuesday he will visit the Israeli-occupied West Bank to meet Palestinian leaders, before travelling to Jordan on Wednesday.

Lula's visit, the first to the region by a Brazilian head of state, comes days after Israel's controversial decision on new settlements in east Jerusalem and as the new Security Council non-permanent member seeks a voice in efforts to reach an Israeli-Palestinian peace



deal.

Israel announced approval for the construction of 1,600 new homes for Jewish settlers in Arab east Jerusalem, threatening US hopes of reviving stalled peace talks and sparking continuing fury in Washington with its key Middle East ally.

Before leaving Brazil, he said in an interview the Middle East peace effort needs "someone with neutrality to speak the truth to the Israelis, to tell the truth to Palestinians, Iranians, Syrians, and whoever wants

to hear the truth."

While in the region Lula is also expected to reiterate Brasilia's stance on Iran's controversial nuclear programme, which major Western powers fear may be a cover for a covert atomic arms project, despite Tehran's strenuous denials. Lula has made it clear he considers Iranian participation a key to peace efforts in the Middle East. He visited Tehran in May last year and in turn welcomed President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Brazil in November.

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Sarkozy faces heavy loss in French regional poll

By James Mackenzie

PARIS (Reuters) – French President Nicolas Sarkozy's UMP party was beaten by the Socialists in the first round of regional elections on Sunday, according to early results which also showed a resurgence for the far-right.

Sarkozy has tried to play down the importance of the ballot, saying it would have no impact on his reform drive and would not force a major cabinet reshuffle, but the scale of the projected loss heartened the Socialists after years of bitter infighting.

"This vote represents a severe punishment for the right," said the Socialist party's Segolene Royal, who lost heavily to Sarkozy in the 2007 presidential election.

Initial estimates showed the Socialists winning up to 30 percent of the first round vote against around 27 percent for the UMP and its coalition partners, leaving the left well placed to win convincingly

in the second round run-off on March 21. The Greens and far-right National Front also scored highly in the vote, while the far-left and centrists lost ground.

The vote was the last national test before the 2012 presidential race and the Socialists had been counting on a successful result to build a platform to challenge Sarkozy.

However, the Socialists also triumphed in the last regional vote in 2004, winning all but two of mainland France's 22 regions only to then lose heavily in 2007 national elections.

Unemployment at more than 10 percent and worries over issues such as security and immigration have drained support for the government in the euro zone's No. 2 economy while Sarkozy's personal approval ratings have dropped to around 36 percent. But Prime Minister Francois Fillon said a record abstention rate, estimated at some 53 percent, made it impossible

to draw any conclusions at national level.

"Against all previous predictions, nothing has been decided for the second round in numerous regions. Everything is still left to do," he said.

NATIONAL FRONT RESURFACES

Opinion polls before the vote had forecast a good result for the Socialists but the surprisingly strong backing for the anti-immigration National Front and the Greens left both well placed also to play a significant role in the second round. The Greens were expected to hook up with the Socialists, but the National Front will carry on alone and will almost certainly bleed votes from the UMP in some key polls. "The National Front, which people said was beaten, dead and buried by the president, has shown that it is still a national force, and probably getting bigger and bigger," veteran far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen



France's President Nicolas Sarkozy delivers the inaugural speech at the international conference on major forest areas in Paris, March 11, 2010.

REUTERS/Philippe Wojazer

told TF1 television. The far-right was forecast to win up to 12 percent of the vote at a nationwide level, with Le Pen himself expected to win more than 20 percent of the vote in southern region based around the Mediterranean port of Marseille. In the last parliamentary election in 2007, the party took just 4.3 percent of the vote.

The environmentalist Europe Ecology party won an estimated 12.5 percent of the vote on Sunday, making it France's third biggest political party. France's regional councils, responsible for issues ranging from maintaining school buildings to local transport, have little economic power and normally attract scant interest. □



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'Alice' extends her No. 1 stay with \$62 million



An image of Johnny Depp, as the Mad Hatter in the new 'Alice in Wonderland' film, stares down through the plastic tent covering the red carpet outside the Kodak Theatre as preparations continue for Sunday's Academy Awards in Los Angeles, on Saturday, March 6, 2010.

By **DAVID GERMAIN**,
AP Movie Writer

LOS ANGELES — Alice is still ruling the movie palace. Johnny Depp and Tim Burton's "Alice in Wonderland" easily remained the No. 1 weekend draw with \$62 million, according to studio estimates Sunday. The Disney fantasy has climbed to a \$208.6 million

(AP Photo/Amy Sancetta)

total domestically, becoming the first \$200 million hit released this year. In its second weekend in theaters, "Alice in Wonderland" pulled ahead of the \$206.5 million domestic haul of "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" to become the top-grossing of Depp and Burton's seven films together,

which include "Edward Scissorhands," "Sweeney Todd" and "Corpse Bride." "I believe it's literally the magical, if you would, pairing of Tim and Johnny," said Chuck Viane, head of distribution for Disney. "When you take those two, they always seem to make something really out of the ordinary."

"Alice in Wonderland" added \$76 million overseas to bring its international total to \$221 million and its worldwide gross to \$430 million.

A rush of new movies had so-so openings, led by Matt Damon's Iraq War thriller "Green Zone," which debuted at No. 2 with \$14.5 million domestically. Released by Universal, "Green Zone" stars Damon as the leader of a U.S. Army team who stumbles onto a conspiracy over the search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Paramount's romantic comedy "She's Out of My League"

debuted at No. 3 with \$9.6 million. The movie stars Jay Baruchel as a geek in an unlikely romance with a babe. "Twilight" star Robert Pattinson's romantic drama "Remember Me" opened at No. 4 with \$8.3 million. The Summit Entertainment release stars Pattinson and "Lost" co-star Emilie de Ravin in a dark story of young lovers with tragedy in their past.

In its fourth weekend, Paramount's "Shutter Island," the latest collaboration between Leonardo DiCaprio and Martin Scorsese, was No. 5 with \$8.1 million, raising its domestic total to \$108 million.

Debating at No. 6 with \$7.6 million was Fox Searchlight's comedy "Our Family Wedding," starring America Ferrera as a Hispanic bride marrying a black man.

"Alice in Wonderland" took in nearly as much as the rest of the top-10 movies combined.

"It's like this great divide between the No. 1 and 2 films, which says that without 'Alice in Wonderland' in the marketplace, we'd be hurting right now," said Paul Dergarabedian, box-office analyst for Hollywood.com. "By itself, it's really propelling huge box office."

Hollywood's business soared, with overall revenues at \$144 million, up 43 percent from the same weekend last year, when "Race to Witch Mountain" led with a \$24.4 million debut.

For the year, revenues are at \$2.24 billion, up 9 percent compared to receipts last year, when Hollywood took in a record \$10.6 billion.

Factoring in higher admission prices, movie attendance this year is running 6.7 percent ahead of 2009's, according to Hollywood.com. Before "Alice in Wonderland" opened, attendance was lagging slightly behind last year's. □

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Fed may hint at how long rates will stay at lows

By JEANNINE AVERSA,
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON — Federal Reserve policymakers may signal at their meeting this week how and when the improving economy will lead them to start raising record-low interest rates.

Higher rates are still months away, Chairman Ben Bernanke and other Fed officials have signaled in appearances on Capitol Hill and in speeches. They've indicated that low rates are still required to foster the economic rebound.

Yet once the recovery is firmly entrenched, Fed policymakers will need to raise rates to keep inflation in check. Before they do, they first will want to signal that credit will soon be tightened. The trick is doing so without jolting investors and borrowers, who would face higher rates on certain credit cards, some mortgages and other loans.

How best to telegraph the approach of higher rates is likely to dominate discussions

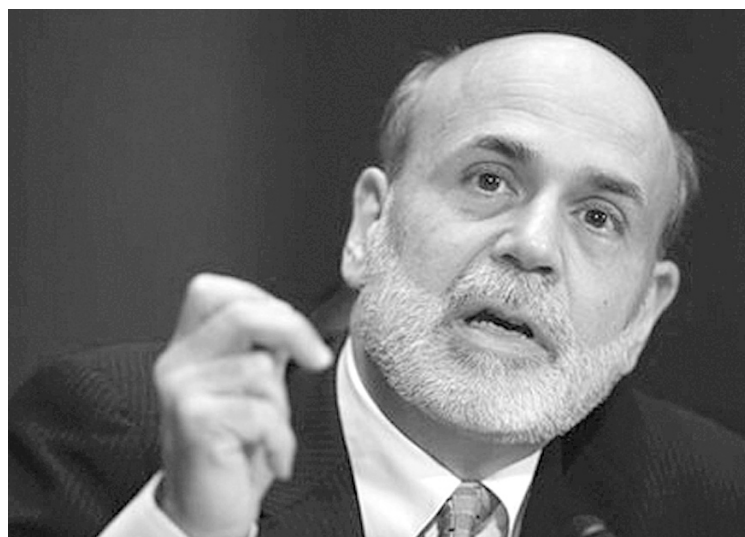
when Bernanke and his colleagues meet Tuesday. In particular, the Fed will decide whether to keep, or water down, its year-long pledge to keep rates at "exceptionally low" levels for an "extended period." Economists generally think "extended period" means at least six more months.

The Fed could drop that commitment altogether. Or it could pledge to keep rates low for "some time," which is viewed as briefer than an extended period. Or it could change its language in some other way to stress that credit will be tightened when the time is right. Any such step would send a signal that the days of easy money are fading.

The push for change is already under way inside the Fed. At its last meeting in late January, Thomas Hoenig, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, favored changing the language to say rates would stay low for "some time," according to the meeting's minutes.

Hoenig said he thought such a change would give the Fed more flexibility to start raising rates, the minutes said. And he said a move toward "modestly higher" rates should happen soon. Hoenig and other "hawks" on the Fed worry more about inflation heating up because of record-low rates than about keeping rates low to try to reduce the unemployment rate, now at 9.7 percent. The fact that the jobless rate, though high, hasn't budged for two months and fewer jobs are being lost than a year ago suggests the recovery is on track. Factory and service-sector activity is picking up. Consumers and businesses are spending enough to keep the economy growing moderately.

Chris Rupkey, an economist at the Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi, doesn't rule out a change in the "extended period" language at Tuesday's meeting. Others think a wording change is more likely at the Fed's next scheduled meeting, April 27-



FILE - In this Feb. 25, 2010 file photo, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington. Federal Reserve policymakers may signal at their meeting this week how and when the improving economy will lead them to start raising record-low interest rates.

(AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta, File)

28. By then, the Fed would have another reading on the employment climate.

"Markets are not ready for a change yet," said Terry Connelly, dean of Golden Gate University's Ageno School of Business in San Francisco.

Though the economy is healing from the worst recession since the 1930s, "the economic

recovery is still very fragile," William Dudley, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, said in a March 11 speech. Investors also will be looking to see if the Fed makes any changes to an economic-support program that's lowered mortgage rates and bolstered the housing market. □



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Manny Pacquiao dominates Joshua Clottey in front of 50,994



ARLINGTON, Texas — Joshua Clottey may have been bigger, but that was his only edge on Saturday night. Manny Pacquiao clearly outworked Clottey, outpunching him four, five and even six to one at times in winning a wide decision before a standing room-only crowd of 50,994 at Cowboys Stadium. Pacquiao punished Clottey with combinations to the body throughout in winning

the unanimous decision to retain his World Boxing Organization welterweight title and his status as the world's finest boxer. It was no contest as Clottey simply kept his guard high and rarely threw punches. According to CompuBox, Pacquiao landed 246 of 1,231 punches; Clottey connected on just 108 of 399. Pacquiao took advantage by using his blazing hand speed to rip through Clottey's gloves and

land hard, punishing shots. He made the former champion wince several times as he fired off hard combinations at Clottey's midsection. Despite the exhortations in the corner of trainer Lenny DeJesus, Clottey never opened up and fought aggressively. He was backed up all night and, except for an occasional shot, never did much to Pacquiao. It was another virtuoso performance for the



Filipino superstar who has won titles or has claimed the linear championship in seven different weight classes. Pacquiao is on a

collision course with unbeaten rival Floyd Mayweather Jr., who fights Shane Mosley on May 1. □



Humberto Soto dominates Diaz to take lightweight belt

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP)—Mexico's Humberto Soto claimed the WBC lightweight title with a dominant unanimous decision victory over American David Diaz on Saturday. Fighting on the undercard of the Manny Pacquiao-Joshua Clottey bout, Soto prevailed in just his second fight at lightweight. He had previously held the WBC's super featherweight and interim featherweight titles. He knocked Diaz down in the first round and dominated the fight. He also dropped Diaz late in the final round, but the American got up just as the bell sounded to end the fight. Diaz was a former lightweight champion who lost his title when he was stopped by Pacquiao in June 2008. Also on the undercard, former WBC lightweight champion Jose Luis Castillo announced his retirement after quitting on his stool in his bout

against Mexican compatriot Alfonso Gomez. Castillo, who has battled weight issues for years, landed just 47 punches before telling the referee after the fifth round that he'd had enough. "I just found out tonight I don't have it anymore," Castillo said. "I want to apologize to the public and I am definitely announcing my retirement." Castillo looked nothing like the fighter who engaged in a memorable brawl with Diego Corrales five years ago that lives in boxing lore. He landed just about half of the punches that Gomez landed, and was on his way to a lopsided loss when he decided to quit, ending his career at the age of 36. Castillo, a former lightweight and junior welterweight champion from Mexico, hadn't fought on a top level since a knockout loss to Ricky Hatton three years ago. He finished with a 60-10-1 career mark. □

Browns trade QB Brady Quinn

CLEVELAND (AP)—The Cleveland Browns have traded quarterback Brady Quinn(notes) to the Denver Broncos for fullback Peyton Hillis(notes) and a 2011 draft pick.

The teams announced the trade Sunday and said the deal

Unsigned Tomlinson goes home after visit with Jets

NEW YORK (AP)—LaDainian Tomlinson(notes) flew home to San Diego on Saturday to consider his options after spending a day with the New York Jets and leaving without a deal.

The free agent—the eighth-leading rusher in NFL history—was on a flight Saturday morning after his visit.

He arrived in New Jersey on Thursday night after meeting with the Minnesota Vikings and spent Friday touring the Jets' facility in Florham Park. He then had dinner with coach Rex Ryan, general manager Mike Tannenbaum and other team officials, who tried to persuade him to join an offense ranked No. 1 in rushing last season.

It was uncertain if Tomlinson would decide between the Jets and Vikings or visit other teams. He has not commented on his plans or visits with the Jets and Vikings.

Tomlinson, who has rushed for 12,490 career yards, will turn 31 in June and was released by the Chargers last month after his least productive season. He ran for 730 yards on 223 carries for an average of 3.3 yards per carry, all career lows.

Tomlinson scored 12 touchdowns, but his role was reduced in an offense now geared toward Philip Rivers(notes) and the passing game. □

is pending physicals.

Quinn's departure comes one day after the Browns agreed to terms with free agent Jake Delhomme(notes) on a two-year contract.

Quinn went 3-9 in 12 starts for Cleveland, which acquired him in the first round of the 2007 draft.

Strasburg works 3 scoreless innings

VIERA, Fla. (AP)—Stephen Strasburg(notes) pitched three scoreless innings and the Washington Nationals fell to 0-10 in exhibition play with Sunday's 7-3 loss to the St. Louis Cardinals.

Strasburg, the top overall pick in last year's draft who signed a record \$15.1 million contract, allowed two singles and a walk in his second spring training start. The right-hander

threw 29 of 49 pitches for strikes, often battling gusty crosswinds.

He struck out two—getting David Freese(notes) looking on an 80 mph breaking pitch to end the first—and threw first-pitch strikes to seven of the 11 hitters he faced.

Cardinals right-hander Adam Wainwright(notes) allowed two runs on three hits and two walks in four innings. He struck out two. □



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No. 4 Duke holds off Georgia Tech 65-61 to win ACC

GREENSBORO, N.C. (AP)—Kyle Singler scored 20 points and Jon Scheyer hit a critical 3-pointer with 18 seconds left to help No. 4 Duke beat Georgia Tech 65-61 in Sunday's Atlantic Coast Conference tournament championship game. Scheyer finished with 16 points for the top-seeded Blue Devils (29-5), who let an 11-point lead with 6 minutes left slip all the way to one before Scheyer's big shot. Nolan Smith also had 16 points to help Duke earn a league-record 18th tournament title, breaking a tie with rival North Carolina. In a tournament filled with upsets, it took a gritty effort from Duke's high-scoring "Big Three" to hold off a determined comeback from

the seventh-seeded Yellow Jackets (22-12), who were trying to become the first team in tournament history to win four games in four days. Duke has won nine of the past 12 ACC tournaments and was in prime position to grab a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament. Freshman Derrick Favors had 22 points and 11 rebounds to lead the Yellow Jackets, who were trying to become the lowest-seeded team to win the tournament. Georgia Tech fell behind 8-0 and trailed 52-41 after Scheyer's 3-pointer with 6:19 to play. But the Yellow Jackets ran off nine straight points to get within 60-59 on Favors' dunk with 47.9 seconds left. But Scheyer—who was just 1 of 8 from behind the arc to



that point—lost Glen Rice Jr. around a screen and swished a 3 from the right side to push the lead back to four points. Then, after a driving basket from Iman Shumpert, Singler knocked down two free throws with 9 seconds left to make it a two-possession game and essentially seal the victory. It was fitting that Duke

punctuated the game at the free throw line. The Blue Devils made 24 of 28 free throws, including 21 of 23 in the second half to offset a 6-of-22 (27 percent) shooting performance after the break and keep the Yellow Jackets in catch-up mode almost all game. Singler was named MVP

despite shooting 3 of 15 from the field, though he did make 14 of 16 free throws—the 14 were a championship-game record—and finished with six rebounds. He had a nasty red scratch about 4 inches long on the back of his right shoulder, the result of diving over a courtside table for a loose ball, almost landing on Dick Vitale and ending up on the floor between press-row tables late in the first half. When the horn sounded, Singler leapt into the arms of Smith for a hug near the sideline, then ran to hug senior Brian Zoubek as the Blue Devils began their oncourt celebration. In many ways, it had to be a relief considering everything that had gone on in Greensboro this week.

The Blue Devils were the only one of the top six seeds to make it to the semifinals in a tournament that had seen a bevy of ugly, low-scoring games in a Greensboro Coliseum that had numerous rows of empty green seats in the upper level from tipoff of Thursday's games. □

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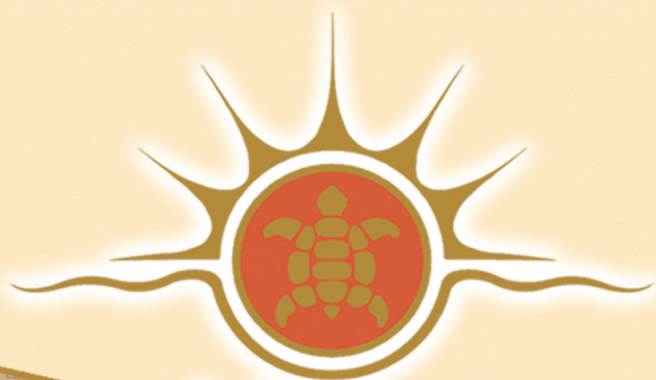
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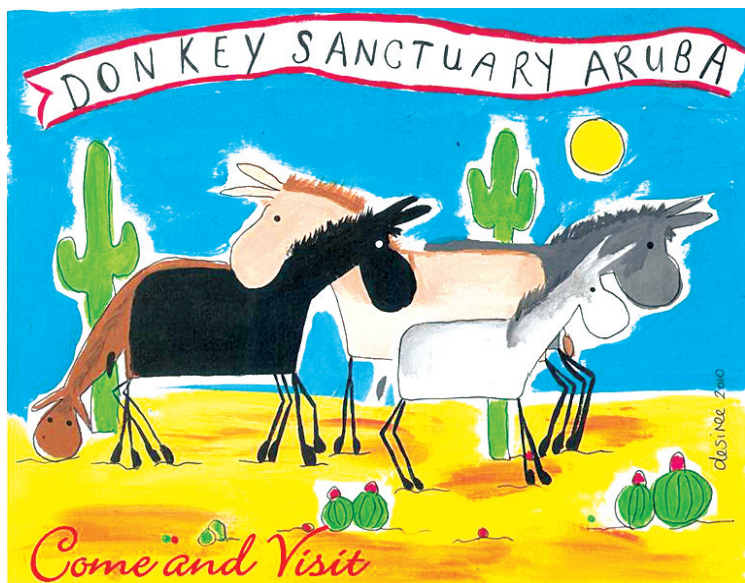
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Fernando Alonso wins on Ferrari debut



BAHRAIN- Fernando Alonso won the season-opening Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix and led a Ferrari one-two in a dream debut with the Italian glamour team.

In a race led for more than two thirds of the distance by Germany's Sebastian Vettel before the Red Bull slowed and was reeled in, the Spaniard laid down a marker for the

season with his 22nd career victory.

"There is no better way to start the relationship," declared the double world champion after collecting the winner's trophy and a bottle of non-alcoholic local fizz. "I am with the best team in the world."

Brazilian Felipe Massa was overtaken by Alonso at the first corner and finished runner-up,

16 seconds behind, on his race return from life-threatening head injuries suffered in Hungary last July.

Britain's Lewis Hamilton, the 2008 world champion, completed the podium for McLaren, 23.1 second behind Alonso, with Vettel slipping to fourth after starting on pole.

"It's a pity but what can you do. All in all it's been positive all weekend apart from the failure," said Vettel.

"Everything was running smoothly, but I lost power with about 20 laps to go, we are not sure what it was yet, but it wasn't good. Luckily I could continue and finish

fourth but we should have won really."

Seven-times world champion Michael Schumacher, making a comeback at the age of 41 and after three years away, was sixth for Mercedes and one place behind fellow-German team mate Nico Rosberg.

The former Ferrari ace said his race was as good as it could have been.

"Overtaking here is impossible and that is the action we are going to have with this environment of race strategy," he said. It was Alonso's first triumph since he won the 2008 Japanese Grand Prix for Renault and he weaved his car jubilantly across the track as he approached the chequered flag without a rival in sight.

"We only won the first race but to come first and second is the result that all the guys at Maranello and at the track deserved," he said.

"I am very optimistic for the rest of the season," added the Spaniard, who went on to win the title in both the years that he has previously won in Bahrain.

Ferrari's first one-two finish since France in June 2008 also ended a run of three wins in a row by Renault-powered Red Bull, last year's overall runners-up.

With no refuelling allowed and after racing in searing temperatures at the newly-extended desert circuit, Alonso collected 25 points for the win under a scoring system that now rewards the top 10 finishers.

After parking up, the Spaniard stood on the car and celebrated -- punching the air and beating his chest before hugging mechanics.

In a race low on thrills and spills and with little overtaking as cars burned through their heavy fuel loads, world champion Jenson Button made a faltering start to the defence of his title with seventh place on his McLaren debut.

Malaysian-owned Lotus, their exalted name returning to the sport after a 16-year absence, proved to be the best of the three all-new teams and the only ones with a car still running at the finish.

Finland's Heikki Kovalainen was 15th, two laps down, and Italian Jarno Trulli 17th and last of those classified.

"What an amazing day. Lotus is back," said team boss Tony Fernandes.

India's Karun Chandhok retired on the second lap on his debut for the HRT team while Brazilian team mate Bruno Senna retired on the 19th. □

Glen Davis denies intentionally hurting Shaq

CLEVELAND (AP)— Boston's Glen Davis (notes) denies he intentionally tried to hurt Shaquille O'Neal (notes) in a game earlier this season, calling the accusations "crazy."

O'Neal is expected to miss the rest of Cleveland's regular season after tearing a ligament in his thumb when Davis blocked his shot in a game in Boston on Feb. 25. After the block, replays seemed to catch Davis squeezing O'Neal's hand on Cleveland's next possession.

Davis says he was simply battling O'Neal for position and didn't know the hand was injured until O'Neal called a timeout and said his thumb



was broke as he walked toward the bench.

Davis texted O'Neal after the incident and says O'Neal responded, "Don't worry, I'll be back."

Both played at LSU. Davis calls O'Neal one of his favorite players growing up, and the day he met O'Neal for the first time was "the highlight of my life." □



At the Radisson Aruba Resort Spa & Casino

Friends of the Handicapped Foundation Concludes Fundraising Season with Donations



PALM BEACH – Generous donation checks were handed out by the Friends of the Handicapped Foundation to 24 local not-for-profit organizations dedicated to the welfare of the mentally, intellectually, physically and emotionally challenged.

Among recipients of donations Mi Por, an organization of mothers with handicapped infants, Foster Home Imeldahof, the Edmund Harms Hospice Foundation, the hearing-impaired Funari school & FEPO, Fundacion Respeta Mi which guards against child abuse, Ambiente Nobo, sister Philothea's home for the handicapped, Ambiente Feliz & AVA, catering to special-need kids, Centro Kibrahacha for the elderly, Bibito Pin, a school for children with disabilities, Fundacion Cas Marie, dedicated to those suffering from dementia, Clown Doctors who visit the elderly and also kids in the hospital's children's ward, the Red Cross dedicated to disaster first response and management and Fundacion Pa Nos Muchanan whose name indicates care for children, Falpa, foundation Arubano pa lectura, Adopt an Addict, FAVI, helping the visually impaired, Stichting Thuiszorg Aruba, Stichting Epilepsie Aruba - SEA, Samba, a rehab center, Sonrisa, a therapy center for mentally challenged kids and their parents, first time donation recipient Fundacion Autismo Aruba and Fundacion Hacienda.

Continued on Page B3

The Coconut Trading Company contributes to the Repair of the World



PALM BEACH – At the opening of its new flagship store, The Coconut Trading Company, at the Village Mall on Palm Beach, Managing Director Jodi Tobman made an announcement that on the eve of her company's -- Salamander Holdings -- 15th anniversary, The Coconut Trading Company brand is joining hands with FPNC, Fundacion pa Nos Comunidad, for an expansion of the company's repair of the world, Tikkun Olam, program already in place since 2007, at T.H. Palm & Company, its equally beautiful gift store at the Playa Linda Beach Resort.

Jodi pledged that FPNC will receive a percentage of sales, from each purchase made at both The Coconut Trading Company at the Village Mall and The Coconut Trading Company at the Marriott Ocean Club.

Over the past few months, the money for the donation was set aside, in line with the company's core value of community support contributing to the repair of the world.

This week, the first generous check was presented to Claudie C. Wegdam, program coordinator by Stephanie Mundle, a member of the CTC staff.

The not for profit FPNC, believes in Gandhi's view that poverty is the worst form of violence, and in light of that philosophy set out to create a food bank, a clothing bank and a furniture bank, reports Wegdam.

Salamander Holdings is FPNC's first proud sponsor.

Pictured here a snapshot of the first donation presentation



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Italians enjoy the Amazonia Experience

PALM BEACH – A group of over 60 Italians staying at Holiday Inn, with Italian tour operator Un Altro Sole, enjoyed the hospitality of Amazonia Churrascaria for just one night.

At the restaurant, the group, Bongioanni, was introduced to the gaúcho-style grilled meats which were surprisingly received by the visitors with voracious appetites and great appreciation of the novel cuisine.



Pictured here the tremendous specialita della casa feast, at Brasiliano & Brasiliana Amazonia Churrascaria.

Don't miss our Plentiful Paella!

A dinner under the Caribbean sky!

Las Ramblas

Tapas & Charcoal Grill

The menu features authentic spanish tapas and entrees such as delicious Seafood Paella, USDA Beef Tenderloin & New Zealand Lamb Chops from the charcoal grill.

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Friends of the Handicapped Continued from Page B1

Friends of the Handicapped is a volunteer organization of tourists wintering on the island at Casa Del Mar, Aruba Beach Club, Costa Linda and Playa Linda.

They distributed the collected funds as they concluded the Winter 2010 fund raising season with over Awg 120,000 in direct donations and in contributions from CEDE Aruba, Centro pa Desaroyo Social di Aruba—the Center for Social Development of Aruba.

To date, the extraordinary visitors have collected much more than one million florins. At the fund distribution ceremony, foundation President Art Stark called recipients up and asked them all to say a few words about their foundations. It was a very moving and emotional evening, as representative of the NGOs outlined the work they do on behalf of the needy also explaining how the funds will be put to good use, paying for transport, renovations, educational materials, kitchen equipment, wheel chairs and conferences, promoting understanding and acceptance of handicapped members of our society.

This year, Stark reports the fund raising activities included a Mega Bingo at the Renaissance Convention Center, a Sweethearts' Valentine's Day Dinner & Dance at the Radisson Aruba Resort Casino & Spa, weekly arts and crafts fairs, Sunday mass donations, a Superbowl party and significant amounts pledged by the local community. Pictured here, the FOH board, at the fund distribution event, handing over

much-needed checks to 24 NGOs supporting Aruba's handicapped community.

John Veneman with CEDE Aruba spoke warmly praising and endorsing the activities of

FOH, he also reported that 100% of the funds were accounted for and administered by CEDE Aruba, awarding them to worthy institutions, in a transparent and accountable manners.

While not all foundation members were present, pictured here Art & Alma Stark, Anoushka Maduro, of Casa Del Mar and Marcelino Kock, both local foundation members, with other board

members, Philip Solomon, Sal & Maryann La Carruba, Pauline Daley, Linda Tobman, David & Tara Ulmschneider, Pat & Marsha Finck, volunteers Jean and Huguette Vateiquette. □



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Today is World Consumers Rights Day

We have a right to be heard

This is THE DAY when consumer rights are remembered and celebrated all over the world. Activities organised worldwide support and promote consumers' basic rights when purchasing a product or service. Each country marks this day by organising activities through which the public is informed and educated about consumer rights. The theme selected by

Consumers International for World Consumers Rights Day is 'Our Money – Our Right.' Do we always have a right? Forty-eight years ago the former USA President, John Kennedy, on March 15, declared that consumers have 4 basic rights – the right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choose and the right to be heard. It is the last right that tends to be overlooked; when our

consumers are told to do this or do that, and they question the wisdom of the order, they hesitate to voice an opinion openly for fear of being victimized. So they grumble in their homes and hope for divine intervention. This attitude does not help our consumer to achieve what is the ultimate aim – a society where freedom of speech is recognised and permitted. Do we want a marketplace that works for us? Or will we be ever satisfied with a marketplace that works against us? Should we have consumers heavily in debt while our government closes its eyes to the growing poverty that embraces us? Take the order to have all taxis painted yellow. The taxi service business has encountered a

slack period in recent months, and the offer by the government to forego something like ninety thousand dollars will not compensate for the cost of repainting a taxi in yellow.

There is no promise that VAT charges will be removed; that order stands. What is the difference between ordering taxis to be painted yellow, from, say, an order to paint the roof of your residence green or all houses in a given colour? The voices of consumers are not heard and therefore the marketplace continues to work against us.

I came across a document on consumer rights which I think bears testimony to the need for consumers to be more vigilant and active. It goes like this: "A marketplace that works with you? or a marketplace that works against you? It's Your Choice

"Consumer Rights Government legislation and

ethical business recognise these:

- The RIGHT to be informed
- The RIGHT to Safety
- The RIGHT to redress.
- The RIGHT to choose
- The RIGHT to a healthy environment
- The RIGHT to a consumer education
- The RIGHT to be heard

"Consumer Responsibilities

- The RESPONSIBILITY to search out and use available information. The RESPONSIBILITY to read instructions and take precautions

- The RESPONSIBILITY to fight for the quality you believe you should be receiving
- The RESPONSIBILITY to make your own independent and informed consumer choices
- The RESPONSIBILITY to minimize environmental damage through careful choice and use of consumer goods and services
- The RESPONSIBILITY to take advantage of educational opportunities
- The RESPONSIBILITY to make your own opinions known

"Consumer Actions

- CHOOSE to read labels, follow instructions, and research before you purchase
 - CHOOSE to use safety equipment, use products as instructed, teach safety habits to children
 - CHOOSE to complain effectively and refuse to accept shoddy workmanship
 - CHOOSE to resist high pressure sales people, and to comparison shop
 - CHOOSE to reduce waste, reuse products wherever possible and recycle
 - CHOOSE to attend seminars and workshops; lobby for consumer education in schools
 - CHOOSE to join Consumidor Arubano Solidario Foundation and make your voice heard
- "Exercise your responsibilities and strengthen your rights. "Responsible consumers create a better marketplace. "It's Your Choice!"

Moreover, any questions customers may have about their rights can be directly asked by calling Fundacion Consumidornan Arubano Solidario, C.A.S., at 5843752, or e-mail: funcas@setarnet.aw. □



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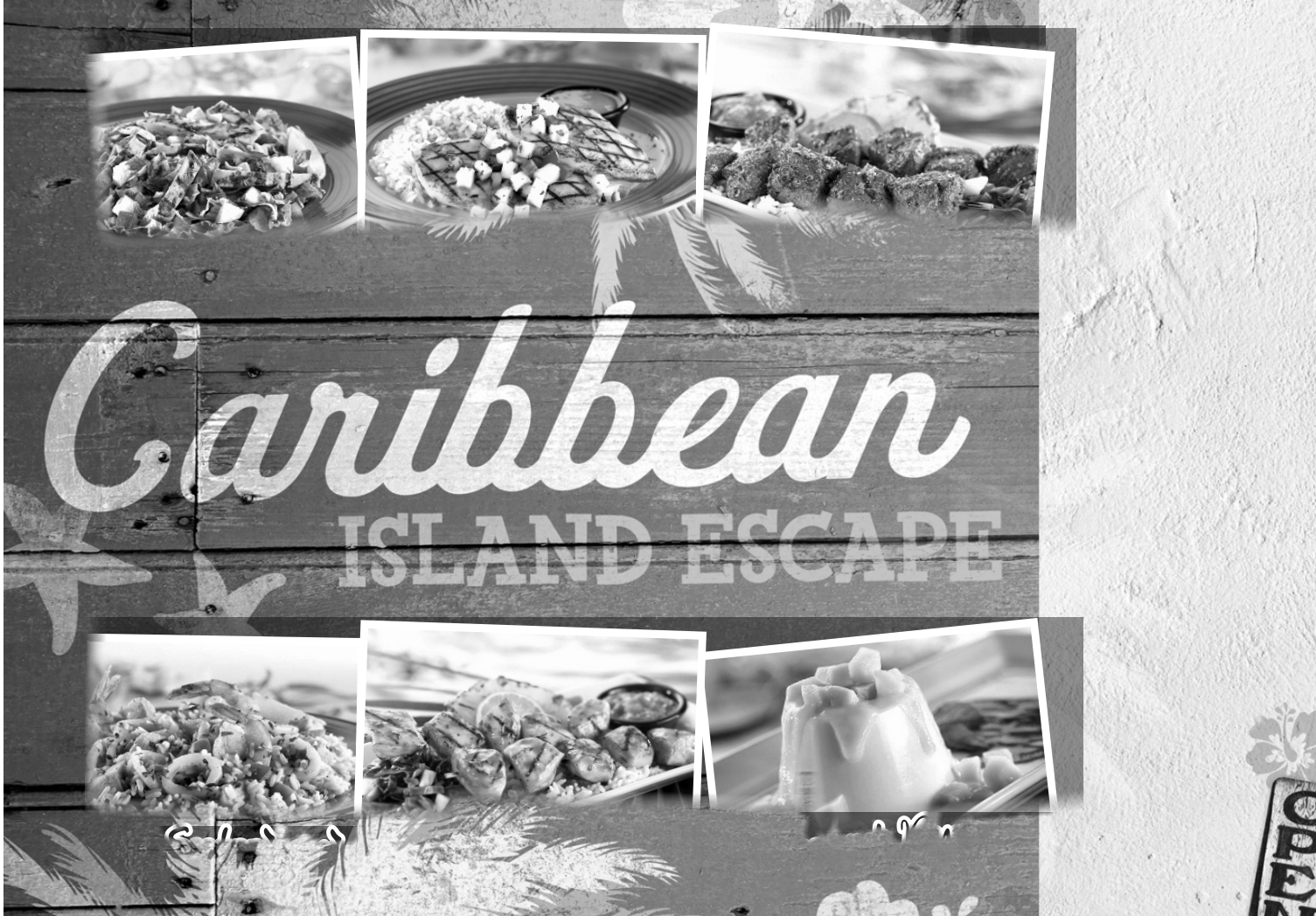
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PDVSA president Rafael Ramirez says committed to shut-down Isla Refinery

Dan Molinski

The head of Venezuela's state oil firm, Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), acknowledged there are "many problems" at a 320,000-barrel-a-day refinery it operates on the Caribbean island of Curacao, but said the company remains committed to it.

The Isla refinery has been completely shut down for nearly two weeks after a power outage caused serious damage to air compressors used at the plant.

No restart date has been announced.

PDVSA president Rafael Ramirez, who is also Venezuela's oil minister, said discussions that began last year about PDVSA possibly buying the refinery from its owner, the Curacao government, are ongoing, and he said a deal remains possible.



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Green light for handling of Kingdom Consensus Laws


THE HAGUE--With 92 for and 58 votes against, the Dutch Parliament's Second Chamber rejected on Thursday the request of the Socialist Party (SP), Party for Freedom PVV and liberal democratic VVD party to declare the Kingdom Consensus Laws "controversial." This means that the Kingdom Consensus Laws needed to dismantle the Country the Netherlands Antilles and realise new constitutional relations for the islands will be handled as planned. In an attempt to keep these laws from being handled under the current caretaker government, the three large opposition parties SP, PVV and VVD had asked to declare controversial the Police and Public Prosecutor's Laws for Curaçao, St. Maarten and the BES islands Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba, the

Regulation for the Governors of Curaçao and St. Maarten, and the law to amend the Kingdom Charter. The one-member faction of Rita Verdonk and the reformed SGP party had voted along with them. SP and PVV had also proposed the same treatment for the Kingdom Consensus Laws to establish the Joint Court and the Council for Maintenance of Law and Order, the law on financial supervision, and the establishment of maritime borders between Curaçao and Bonaire, and between St. Maarten and Saba. VVD had no problems with handling these laws. Christian Democratic Party CDA, Labour Party PvdA, green left party GroenLinks, Christian Union (CU), Democrats D66 and Party for Animals Pvd all voted to continue handling the package


of Kingdom Consensus Laws and to proceed with the general process of constitutional reform of the Netherlands Antilles. CDA, PvdA, GroenLinks and CU contended that the Antillean constitutional reform process had been in the making for several years, with agreements dating back to 2006, and the Netherlands needed to stick to its side of the deal. "There was already an accord between the previous cabinet and the Netherlands Antilles," said MP Ernst Cramer (CU). Irresponsible "There are multi-annual agreements, and third parties are involved. It would be irresponsible to delay this. We have to proceed. We want the debt reorganisation to continue, also for a better future of the people on the islands," said MP Ineke van Gent (GroenLinks). "The main lines were already prepared by former cabinets, by Ministers Alexander Pechtold (D66) and Atzo Nicolaï (VVD)," said MP Liesbeth Spies (CDA), who pointed out that there was also an "urgent appeal" by the Netherlands Antilles to handle the laws. Member of Parliament (MP) Hero Brinkman (PVV) said the Dutch voter never had a chance to express his/her opinion on the Antillean constitutional reform laws and the accompanying debt reorganisation of 1.7 billion euros, and therefore the entire Antillean dossier needed to be put on hold until after the June 9 Dutch Parliamentary elections. He said the voters were being "treated with contempt." Election programme Spies (CDA) contradicted the statement that the Dutch voter had never had a chance to be heard on the constitutional

reform process and debt reorganisation. "It was part of the 2007 CDA election programme. We did seek the opinion of the voter in the last elections," said Spies. MP Diederik Samson (PvdA) seconded Spies by saying that the October 2006 (with the BES islands) and November 2006 (with Curaçao and St. Maarten) Final Accords were sealed prior to the previous elections in 2007. He noted that the Antillean constitutional reform process was part of these elections in which PVV participated. Samson said that, for his party, there were two exceptions to the unwritten rule of honouring a request by a substantial minority to declare certain law proposals and policy documents controversial. The wish of the minority didn't necessarily have to be honoured when the request could "unnecessarily hurt" the relationship with another country, or when Government's finances were jeopardised. He said the first exception applied to the Netherlands Antilles. Blackmail Brinkman (PVV) accused PvdA of being "blackmailed" by the Netherlands Antilles. "They are saying we'll be very mad at you if this doesn't proceed." Samson pointed out that the debt reorganisation was "current policy" and would continue. MP Johan Remkes (VVD) said there were two basic rules in democracy: the majority ruled, and the majority would give consideration to the minorities. "That can't be messed with," he said. Remkes called it "peculiar" that Parliament didn't proceed with changes to the Dutch Constitution, but that it did approve handling an

amendment to the Kingdom Charter, which is a law of higher order than the Constitution. Remkes also said it was curious that Parliament wanted to proceed with processing the Police and Public Prosecutor's Office laws which, according to him, contained "disputable" aspects. He said the legislation process would not be completed before the target date of October 10, 2010. "I'll bet a good bottle of wine that we won't make that," he said. Nevertheless, Parliament is "forcing through entire laws in a late afternoon." As for St. Maarten being ready for 10-10-10, Remkes wondered what had happened to the December 2008 motion, supported by the entire Second Chamber, that St. Maarten could not attain country status until the island had proved that it was ready to assume this new responsibility in practice. Automatic pilot "There was a lot of concern over whether St. Maarten would be ready in time. Apparently those concerns have blown over," said Remkes. He suggested the Dutch Government and State Secretary of Kingdom Relations Ank Bijleveld-Schouten were not sticking to the November 2006 Final Accord. "They are following another course – one where St. Maarten attains its new status on automatic pilot," he said. MP Ronald van Raak (SP) said his party had a "clear motivation" to ask for a delay in handling the Antillean constitutional reform laws. "We also want debt reorganisation, good governance, proper finances, and investments in education, health care and safety. But 10-10-10 puts our back against the wall. □



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The French Steakhouse delivers dining under the stars



Eagle Beach – The French Steakhouse at the Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa just added another charming dining option, a tropical outdoor courtyard, featuring delicious cuisine under the stars.

The famed French Steakhouse prides itself on the elegant dining experience it offers patrons in the fully air-conditioned dining room. Yet recently the idea of adding a garden spot to the existing blueprint began to sprout in the creative mind of Executive Chef George Hoek, and he immediately recruited the landscapers to create the

intimate, lovely setting.

The French Steakhouse Ooh-La-La menu is now served indoor and alfresco, featuring creative appetizers, soups, salads, seafood dishes, poultry and the Pièce de Résistance South American & USDA Beef specialties.

Among popular appetizers the chef's Tropical Crab Cakes with pineapple & mango salsa and the Teriyaki Glazed Seared Duck Breast, served with garden greens and balsamic dressing, are real crowd pleasers.

True to the restaurant's French roots, the Onion Soup

is a classic, while the Honey Glazed Salmon Salad winks at the exotic East with a sweet soy dressing.

The menu features a great variety of seafood dishes from fresh fish to the totally sinful and amazingly-decadent Caribbean Stuffed Shrimp with Crabmeat and Bacon, which became an instant hit. The tequila and sweet chili glaze, lends the Jumbo shrimp a pure taste of heaven!



The French Steakhouse is naturally famous for the South American Churrasco steak, a signature preparation, which now shares the stage with juicy USDA beef specialties such as NY Sirloin and Filet Mignon.

Light-eaters will find the Jerk Chicken Skewers and the Lemon Herb Broilers very satisfying.

Open seven days a week from 5:30 p.m. - 11:00 p.m. the French Steakhouse is blessed with the nicest staff and a delightfully renovated dining

room with sparkling China, crisp linen, an interesting bread basket, colossal desserts and live jazz on piano with Eddy Samson who is Aruba's best entertainer, and a walking & breathing music encyclopedia, just whistle the tune, and Eddy will produce a symphonic version of your favorite song.

Hungry patrons will appreciate the Ambassador's 5-course menu featuring the run of the menu highlights for just \$34.95 per person. www.manchebo.com/steakhouse

Pega Pega Café & Beach Bar reinvents Beach Cuisine



Eagle Beach – Pega Pega Café & Beach Bar at the Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa is widely recognized as the home of Beach Cuisine.

Executive Chef George Hoek and his culinary team serve a Sun Splashed menu on the ocean front terrace, raising the restaurant to a must-visit, must-try status.



The contemporary menu, lists many favorite dishes from around the world, borrowing inspiration from US, Mexican, Thai, Jamaican, Cuban, Greek and Mediterranean kitchens, all served with a tropical, Caribbean flair.

From Sun-Sational Salads, to

Cuban pressed jawbreakers and wraps, mid-day platters also include oversize Beef Burgers, Philly Cheese Steak Sandwiches and Hot Dogs.

The Pega Pega tropical & frozen cocktail list, with fresh fruit or ice cream smoothies, daiquiris, coladas and margaritas, leaves nothing out, including Yellow Birds, Sex on the Beach and Mudslides, making a lunch-time brain-freeze, extremely easy to get!

The Pega Pega, one of Aruba oldest beach bars is open on fabulous Eagle Beach, with unrivaled views, caring, gracious service, and relaxed atmosphere, from 12 noon to 5 p.m. The bar is open from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.



Giorgio's Ristorante Italiano introduces Menu Turistico

Eagle Beach -- Giorgio's Ristorante Italiano located at the heart of the low-rise hotels at the Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa, delivers authentic Mediterranean flavors, at a reasonable price.

The restaurant has just introduced Menu Turistico a three-course dinner featuring appetizers, main courses and desserts for just \$19.95, per person, plus 15% service charge.

Patrons may choose between home made soup and Caesar salad, Fettuccini Alfredo, Lasagna Casarecia, Spaghetti alla Bolognese or any favorite pizza with Tiramisu, Cheese Cake or Ice Cream for the sweet finale.

Executive Chef George Hoek is the resort's much-appreciated culinary expert. He was the recent recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by the Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association in collaboration with the Digicel Group. Chef George accepted the Shoco Award, the national award of excellence, and Aruba's top professional decoration, in the tourism industry. □



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PALM BEACH – The health and calorie conscious among us need fear steakhouses no more. Whether it's a low-carb, low-fat, or even vegetarian diet you follow, Texas de Brazil Churrascaria fits into just about every dieter's menu plan.

Low carb eaters will have all their expectations surpassed with a tempting carnivorous selection of umpteen cuts of sizzling beef, pork, lamb, sausage, and poultry. The meats are prepared in the healthiest style of cooking—slow roasting—where much of the fat drips off in the roasting process, so those looking for a lower fat option to sautéing, pan frying, or deep frying will also be able to indulge.

The Brazilian-style steakhouse also offers a garden full of healthy eats on a lavish 40-item seasonal salad bar, giving dieters plenty to choose from to accompany the

slow-roasted meats. A selection of fresh lettuces and vegetables may be standard for most salad bars, but Texas de Brazil's version goes a gourmet twist further, treating the palate to additional items like marinated portabella mushrooms, sweet roasted bell peppers, hearts of palm, sundried tomatoes, imported cheeses—including fresh buffalo mozzarella—sushi, home-made soups, and much more.

The salad bar is included in the continuous service meal with unlimited choices from the grilled meats, but for vegetarians or the non-meat eaters, a special price is offered for just the salad bar. Of course, for those looking to splurge while on vacation, Texas de Brazil will gladly serve their garlic mashed potatoes, traditional fried plantains, and their world-famous parmesan cheese bread as part of the meal.

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Fine & Affordable Dining at Pam Pam Restaurant

Meet Chef Ludwich Samson and his exquisite menu now unveiled!



Nestled in the quiet neighborhood of Boegoeroei, Perle d'Or apartment complex houses Dutch students and vacationers, as well as a cozy garden eatery, Pam Pam Restaurant & Bar. Aiming to attract a more diverse clientele, Pam Pam has recently adopted a more upscale dining concept. In order to pilot this new concept, rising local chef Ludwich Samson was brought on board, and in just two months on the job, he has

more than proven his worth.

Laid-back, refreshingly young, and ambitious, Ludwich began his career as a chef by enrolling in Aruba's hospitality and culinary arts school—the best decision he has ever made, he wholeheartedly claims. With ten years in the kitchen and three years as a chef, Ludwich has developed an impressive arsenal of cooking skills. He attributes the majority of his growth as a chef to his years

of working under his mentor, Vittorio Muscarllo, owner of Hostaria Da'Vittorio and one of the most highly respected chefs on Aruba.

In his two months with Pam Pam, Ludwich has entirely remodeled the kitchen to make it more efficient. He has also created a whole new menu featuring particularly unique dishes in order to distinguish Pam Pam from the endless number of restaurants along Aruba's hotel strip. While the menu still offers Dutch snacks and typical Dutch platters like sate to appease the many Dutch interns residing at Perle d'Or, the rest of the menu offers upscale fusion cuisine. Lemon grass and chillies give several seafood dishes a Thai flair; homemade ravioli and beef carpaccio salute Italy; crustacean ceviche adds a Peruvian element; and Indonesian spices add zest to a handful of casual main dishes.

Ludwich also craftily adds little unexpected twists to some classic dishes, elevating the uniqueness of his menu. One of his personal favorites is his porcini-crusted filet mignon served with a thyme red-wine reduction. He also delights in the fact that most diners have a hard time figuring out the sweet and spicy deliciousness of his signature crustacean platter. Other interesting interpretations include lump-crab lollipops, chicken cordon blue unorthodoxly stuffed with ricotta and bacon, and for dessert, tiramisu that promises an untraditional layer of decadent Bailey's chocolate mousse.

Needless to say, Ludwich is creative in the kitchen and works extremely hard, currently putting in 12 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week; but he insists that this is not what makes a good chef good. "I simply love what



I do for a living," confides Ludwich, and this is what guarantees success in the kitchen and contented diners. Of course, being a chef can be downright stressful, but Ludwich thrives on the rush of adrenaline on busy nights. And when he peers out of the kitchen and sees a restaurant full of people enjoying their meals, he experiences immense satisfaction. For reservations call: 5877710 or 7483848, or visit us at www.pampamaruba.com. □

Adam Steinfeld live tonight!

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STEINFELD: 'MAGIC LIVE!' Theater-of-illusions show... now at the WESTIN - Aruba, see it live! 9pm nightly Night Magic-Comedy- Master of illusions. PREPARE to Witness TOP-Class Illusions, Magic & Comedy on Stage. Adam Steinfeld's Magic Live!® show, at the WESTIN - Aruba... 'Sensational!', 'Amazingly Funny!'...the Hottest ticket in Town! A Must See" 'BEST MAGIC SHOW, I've seen in ages...and I hate Magic! - Carol Butz, Belair, Maryland.

'MagicLive!...is Hip-Comedy Entertainment, Adam is the ultimate Modern Magician' - Jacque Polak, CBS-TV. Steinfeld sophisticated card-sharp street magic, mixed with grand theater illusions is a visual feast...this will be the highlight of your vacation. -Al Blanchard, mystery novelist, Boston, MA.

Steinfeld's, comedy magician, likable on-stage personality, comic interactive-wit, and amazing magic, mixed with his dream-like theatre-of-

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"It's obvious Adam's real passion is performing in front of a live audience, as his charisma and charm create an unforgettable show!" Steinfeld is a 'Master of Magic', he invents many of his own Las Vegas illusions that are designed in England, fabricated in Vegas, and travels with him on tour, in a explosion of amazing fun.

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'Dutch can't impose gay marriage on us'

WILLEMSTAD--One cannot impose gay marriages on an autonomous Curaçao, said General Affairs Commissioner Zita Jesus-Leito (PAR) during a public meeting of the Island Council. She was responding at the time to statements made by several opposition members suggesting that possibility.

The Island Council was discussing the draft constitution of country Curaçao. The feasibility of the target date October 10, 2010, for the new Kingdom relations to take effect was discussed during the first question round. During the second round, the opposition members frequently focused on the amendments of the various laws for the BES islands that had been approved by the Dutch Second

Chamber.

Due to these amendments, matters such as abortion, same-sex marriages, and euthanasia will become legal in Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba in a few years. Several opposition members such as Helmin Wiels (PS), Nelson Pierre (NPA), and Gregory Damoen (FK) expressed fear that an autonomous Curaçao will soon be confronted with similar laws as well. This was strongly rejected by Jesus-Leito.

"There is a fundamental difference between the future autonomous countries Curaçao and St. Maarten on the one hand, and the BES islands on the other. Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba will soon become part of the Netherlands, while we will become self-

governing countries within the Kingdom.

"We have negotiated with our Kingdom partners and concluded agreements on five consensus Kingdom laws that regard specific subjects" such as the draft laws for the police, Joint Court of Justice, Council for Administration of Justice, Prosecution, and Financial Supervision, according to the commissioner. "We will handle all other matters," she emphasised.

Jesus-Leito explained once again that the Netherlands couldn't impose matters such as gay marriages on a self-governing Curaçao. "This requires amendment of our Civil Code and the Netherlands does not have a voice in this. To change that, our Parliament will have to adopt an amendment to the law." □

'Zus' (PNP) asked to stay as PAR Finance Minister

WILLEMSTAD--PNP's current Finance Minister Ersilia "Zus" de Lannooy has been asked to stay on as PAR's Finance Minister in the next De Jongh-Elhage cabinet.

De Lannooy stepped down as PNP leader and quit politics before the recent elections for the Antillean Parliament. PNP, now led by Commissioner Humphrey Davelaar, earned just one seat. As such, it will have only a State Secretary in what is supposed to be a short-lived and last Central Government, as the Netherlands Antilles is in the process of being dismantled on 10-10-10. Originally, the current PAR president and faction leader in the Antillean parliament Glen Sulvaran was the party's main candidate for Minister of Finance, but now that the Dutch Second Chamber of Parliament has agreed to handle the legislation related to the constitutional changes, he is needed in parliament in light of all that still needs to be done en route to 10-10-10. The party then decided that since Minister De Lannooy had handled the Central Government's finances for more of the process, it made sense to have her stay on for the remaining less than seven months that the new Antillean cabinet should be in office. □

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Brooks: Inauguration of new plant a triumph for people of St. Maarten



CAY BAY--Utilities company GEBE Managing Director William Brooks calls the inauguration of the power plant expansion and the two new 11.3-mega watt engines as a triumph for the power plant's employees and the people of St. Maarten. Island Council members, GEBE employees, and representatives of generator manufacturer Wärtsilä and the private sector were on hand to witness the inauguration and to hear Brooks say, "In the midst of the turmoil, the men and women at this power plant continued to do everything within their power to keep the lights on."

"The power plant expansion team continued to lay the foundation for the new engines. They worked, sometimes up to 16 hours a day, in dirty, hot and difficult circumstances, knowing that their work would bring a real solution to our capacity issues," Brooks said.

In expounding on the process to acquire the new engines, Brooks stressed that there is no place for short-term solutions in the energy industry. He said he had started his tenure at the company in 2007 and after initial review of the company and the pace of development in St. Maarten, had already foreseen a capacity shortage by 2009. He then explained, step by step, the process in terms of securing financing and ultimately acquiring and commissioning the engines.

"While celebrating this victory today, we are already thinking five years ahead. With the island continuing to develop, GEBE must as well. We have already reserved a spot for a third generator that we may need to order as early as 2011," Brooks said.

"We are working closely with the Island Government and specifically our Commissioner of Energy, Theo Heyliger, to finalise a new concession that strikes the best possible balance between serving our community and maintaining a financially feasible company.

"We will diversify our energy sources with the purchase of electricity from the waste-to-energy plant and renewable energy sources. And together we will continue to make GEBE more reliable, more cost-effective and more environmentally-friendly for our customers, today, and powering a brighter future for our next generation of customers tomorrow," he said.

Brooks also presented a NAf. 50,000 donation to Oranje School, which was adopted by the company some time back.

Lt. Governor Richards

Lt. Governor Franklyn Richards drew laughs from the crowd when he said GEBE should no longer be plagued by any more rats and cats interfering with the power supply. On a more serious note, however, Richards urged GEBE and government to work on what he considered three priority areas.

First, he advised GEBE and government to introduce a communication structure to facilitate the exchange of information between the two entities and to forge a better understanding. Second, considering the constitutional developments, he said the division of GEBE shares had to be addressed. Third, with the introduction of Dutch public entity status for St. Eustatius and Saba, the consumers on the islands need to be redefined.

Heyliger

Commissioner in charge of Energy Affairs Theo Heyliger, also provided a checklist of priorities that he would wish to be addressed by GEBE, in collaboration with the Island Government. In this regard, he was very direct in his remarks about GEBE's relationship with St. Eustatius and Saba, which will soon become public entities of the Netherlands.

"St. Maarten cannot continue to subsidise Saba and Statia in the new BES structure, and I was happy to hear that the Lt. Governor supports this also," Heyliger said, adding that a letter to this effect would be sent to BES Commissioner Henk Kamp next week. Kamp was also a guest at the event.

Heyliger also stressed that renewable energy must be part of GEBE's plan for the future and said the new tariff structure would be based on a business plan. In addition, GEBE's investments and the fuel clause will remain stable and the prices will be in keeping with the amount GEBE actually pays for fuel.

Heyliger also disclosed that GEBE plans to spend one million guilders on street lights for the island, and to sign a waste-to-power agreement with government through which an additional eight megawatts of electricity will be made available to the grid.

He also urged GEBE to set up a scholarship fund or programme so that some of St. Maarten's best and smartest individuals could further their studies in engineering.

GEBE's image, Heyliger said, is also something that has to be addressed. When power houses are constructed around the island, "they do not have to look like the power plant. They can have trees," he said, adding that water tanks and power houses could be made to look more environmentally appealing.

Heyliger also wants a fuel farm to be established to ensure that GEBE obtains the best prices on the market and is not dependent on outside sources. The continued upgrading of the generator fleet, clear policies on meter tampering and customer complaints, and taking over of the island's sewage company should be priorities. GEBE should commit resources for geo-thermal power and thereby decrease the island's dependence on fossil fuels.

Finally, he told Brooks and Supervisory Board of Directors Chairman Julius Lambert that he was looking forward to their forging a strong "marriage" and working together for the benefit of St. Maarten.

Julius Lambert

In his remarks, Lambert explained that the commissioning of the two new generators was the last of six units that were included in GEBE's 1999-2010 business plan. The first two generators went into production in 2001, the third and fourth in 2005, and now the last two. He explained that the highest priority had been given to the plans that had the biggest impact on the company and consumers.

In that light, Lambert said, the reduction of cost and subsequently consumer bills, improvement of reliability, employee morale and protection of the environment were all listed as priorities. With fuel being the largest cost for GEBE, he said it was logical to focus heavily on reducing fuel consumption.

It was a deliberate decision to purchase units that could operate on cheaper heavy fuel, he explained. This will translate into further reduction of cost for GEBE which can be passed on to the consumer on the monthly bills. □

Colombianos inician jornada para elegir nuevo Congreso

BOGOTA (AP) - Las elecciones legislativas se desarrollaban ayer en Colombia sin graves incidentes, pese a las advertencias de grupos de observación electoral sobre una nueva penetración de organizaciones ilegales. Tras emitir su voto el domingo, el presidente Alvaro Uribe visitó el cuartel de la policía para informarse sobre la situación de orden público en el país. Destacó que solamente había un informe sobre presuntas amenazas por parte de las guerrillas a unos conductores de transportes públicos en una carretera del departamento de Antioquia, en la región noroeste del país. "La democracia es todo lo contrario de la violencia. La democracia es todo lo contrario de la corrupción", dijo el gobernante. El director operativo de la policía, general Orlando Páez, informó que unos 155.000 agentes custodiaban la jornada electoral en los 32 departamentos del país. Casi 30 millones de colombianos están habilitados



Colombianos sostienen sus papeltas de votación mientras hacen fila en las elecciones legislativas. Bogotá, domingo 14 de marzo de 2010. (AP foto/William Fernando Martinez)

para votar en la jornada. Las urnas estarán abiertas de las 08.00 (1300 GMT) a las 16.00 (2100 GMT). Se espera que un primer boletín de resultados sea emitido después de las 18.00 (2300 GMT). Alfonso Portela, jefe de control electoral de la Registraduría Nacional, la máxima instancia colombiana para organizar comicios, en una entrevista telefónica calificó con nota 10 la jornada y afirmó que cerca del mediodía no se habían recibido

informes sobre incidentes. Los colombianos eligen por un mandato de cuatro años a 166 diputados y 102 senadores. También podrán votar en la consulta interna para escoger al candidato presidencial por el Partido Conservador y el Partido Verde, para los comicios del 30 de mayo. Ambos grupos optaron por escoger a su candidato en una consulta abierta el domingo, mientras otros partidos designaron a su aspirante internamente. □

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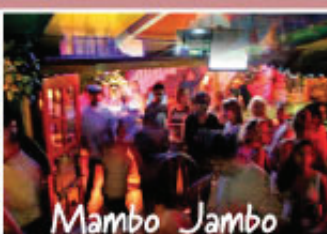
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